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TAGS: PTER PGOV ASEC PREL FAID KJUS KCRM KDEM IZ
SUBJECT: ANBAR FACTIONS RESOLVE LEADERSHIP DISPUTE IN WAKE
OF TERRORIST ATTACK

REF: BAGHDAD 89

Classified By: OPA Director Greta Holtz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar (Ramadi) cable.

¶2. (S) SUMMARY. In the wake of the December 30 terrorist attack on the Anbar Provincial Government Center, which resulted in the severe wounding of Governor Qassim abd Muhammad Hammadi al-Fahadawi, there was some initial governmental confusion and a vacuum of leadership. Within two days, Deputy Governor Fo'ad Jitab al-Karbouli assumed the duties of governor and was accepted by the Provincial Council. The provincial government continues to function effectively under Fo'ad, and has resumed its usual work and its normal positive relationship with the PRT. Looking ahead, indications are that the provincial government may seek a legal accommodation that allows Governor Qassim an extended absence and then a return to his post. END SUMMARY

WHO'S ON FIRST?

¶3. (U) Article 28 of the Provincial Powers Law states that, in the event the Governor is unable to perform his duties, the "First Deputy Governor" will act as governor in his stead. It also states that, if the governor is unable to perform his duties for three months, the Provincial Council (PC) must elect a new governor. However, on the day of the attack, no one knew who the first deputy was. Governor Qassim had two deputies: Deputy Governor for Administration Hikmat Jassim Zaidan and Deputy Governor for Technical Affairs Fo'ad Jitab al-Karbouli. Neither had been previously identified as the first deputy by either the Governor or the PC; both reported directly to the governor on their respective portfolios.

¶4. (S) In the immediate aftermath of the attack, PRTOffs at the scene reported that Deputy Governor Fo'ad was "taking charge" of coordinating rescue, security, and governance efforts at the Provincial Government Center (PGC). At the same time, U.S. forces (USF) reported that their military contacts at the Anbar Operations Center (AOC) believed that Deputy Governor Hikmat was the Acting Governor and were awaiting instructions from him. While Deputy Governor Fo'ad was apparently taking the lead at the PGC, Deputy Governor Hikmat and his media team were engaging the press, correcting misinformation on the attack, and reassuring the Anbari public that the government was in control.

FO'AD, HIKMAT COME TO TERMS...THOUGH FIGHT MAY MOVE TO COURTS

¶4. (S) On 31 December, in a conversation with a USF interpreter, Sheikh Ahmed abu Risha, the Sahwa (MSI) Party Secretary, brushed aside the question of who was to assume the governor's duties, remarking that Fo'ad was the first deputy and thus the Acting Governor. Sheikh Ahmed was in Jordan during the attack, and was returning on 31 December to

Ramadi to meet with both Fo'ad and Hikmat. The USF commander at the Provincial Joint Coordination Cell (PJCC) reported that Hikmat and Fo'ad spent the day behind closed doors working out a leadership agreement. By the day's end, Hikmat acknowledged Fo'ad as first deputy. USF sources reported that Hikmat believed that he was the first deputy and Acting Governor, but knew he did not have the support of Sheikh Ahmed and the Chairman of the Provincial Council, Dr. Jassim Mohammed al-Halbusi. By not objecting to Fo'ad's succession to the governorship, Hikmat obtained Sheikh Ahmed's approval to send a formal request to the Iraqi Parliament and the Office of the Iraqi Prime Minister for a legal interpretation of the provincial law as it applies to the selection of the Qof the provincial law as it applies to the selection of the acting governor.

15. (S) COMMENT: The ongoing demonstrations by Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and Tawafug leadership against the provincial government in the aftermath of the December 30 attack may have discredited Hikmat's bid for the acting governorship (reftel), as Hikmat is a member of the IIP-associated Iraqi National Unity Gathering (INUG) and, although not involved in organizing the protests, could still be linked to them by association. Hikmat may have believed that a favorable response from the Prime Minister's office and Iraqi Parliament, combined with his belief that Fo'ad would prove to be an ineffective Acting Governor, would cause the Provincial Council to view him eventually as a more viable option for Acting Governor, but that does not appear likely.
END COMMENT.

16. (C) The Provincial Council and the PC Chairman moved quickly to recognize Fo'ad as Acting Governor. Fo'ad immediately set about to continuecontinuing the work of the governorship, calling PRTOffs and asking them to come to the PGC and meet with him to discuss ongoing projects. In a January 2 meeting with the Acting PRT Team Leader, Acting Governor Fo'ad confirmed that he and the PC Chairman were working together with the AOC Commander, MG Aziz, to coordinate Iraqi Army assistance to the Iraqi Police to respond to the attacks. Fo'ad stated that the Provincial Council continued to meet and work. At the next AOC meeting, Acting Governor Fo'ad and PC Chairman Jassim attended together, and PRTOff at the meeting noted that Fo'ad was recognized by both the IA and IP as the Acting Governor.

17. (U) In the first week after the attack, the Provincial Council stayed in session, meeting daily, to address the issues of the succession to the governorship, new security measures, protests outside the PGC, the appointment of a new Chief of Police, and perhaps the most difficult, the death of one of their own PC members.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT MAY LOOK TO KEEP QASSIM

18. (C) With the question of an acting governor in the near term resolved, the provincial government has turned its attention to the question of whether Governor Qassim can or will finish his term. Although there has been no official pronouncement, USF at the PJCC report that the Provincial Council is considering passing a resolution confirming that Fo'ad would act as Governor until Qassim was well enough to resume his duties, even if that takes longer than the 90-day period outlined in the Provincial Powers Law. In an Anbar Satellite television interview on January 7, PC Chairman Jassim stated that he "looks forward to Governor Qassim returning to his post after he has healed." Sheikh Riyadh, the Deputy Director of the Sunni Endowment, told the PRT Team Leader on January 14 that he believed that the Provincial Council will seek to hold the position for Qassim until he returns, stating that "this is an emergency situation, and we all hope to have Qassim back as soon as he is able, even if it is over 90 days." He went on to suggest that the public would view it as unfair if Qassim lost his position as Governor, especially as he was an effective governor, through no fault of his own.

¶9. (S) COMMENT. USF reports that Governor Qassim is recovering and responding to treatment in Texas, and is eager to return to work. Given the apparent goodwill generated by the Governor's past efforts and his subsequent enthusiasm for returning to work in spite of his injuries, it is possible that Fo'ad will remain the Acting Governor until Qassim returns, even if after 90 days. This may help buttress the political stability thought to have been shaken by the Governor's wounding. If the goal of the terrorist attack was to disrupt and frustrate the Provincial Government's efforts to rebuild Anbar, it appears to have failed. Despite the undefined line of succession, there was no lapse in leadership after the attack and the Provincial Government continued to meet and govern effectively, overcoming challenges that, even under normal circumstances, would have been difficult to address. END COMMENT.

HILL